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BILLY STAYER



BILLY STAYER The Boy Fireman.

By CHARLES BARNARD.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXPLOSION ON THE FERRY-BOAT.

It was seven o'clock on a cold winter's morning, when a small boy came out on the corner of North Bennett and Hanover streets, in the city of Boston. William, or Billy, Stayer was truly a wonderful boy. He was short, he was

THE ELSIE LURCHED AT THE SAME INSTANT. AND BILLY WAS DRAGGED WITH A TERRIBLE JERK INTO THE SEA!

not pretty, and the boys in the street called him a "very small boy." As he stood there, wrapped in a big overcoat that had been built for his brother, who had died the winter before, with his head half smothered in one of his father's old caps, and almost lost in a pair of rubber boots that once belonged to his revered Uncle James Staver, captain of the steam-tug Jessie, of Boston, he did look rather small. There was nothing visible save the tip of a very fat nose and a red mouth, drawn up in a pucker, as if he wanted to whistle to keep warm. He was on his way to the Chelsea Ferry with his father's dinner. Mr. Staver was a fireman on one of the ferry-boats.

Billy reached the boat, and climbed down an iron ladder to the furnace-room. He handed his father the dinner pail, and then sat down on a pile of coal, and watched the sparks dropping through the bars under the fire.

It was a queer place. On one side coal bunkers. Opposite, the end of a huge black steam boiler, rusty, full of cracks, with little puffs of white steam leaking here and there. On each side of the boiler were the sloping sides of the wooden boat.

After a while a bell rang, and from the noise overhead Billy knew that they were coming into the slip at Chelsea. The engines stopped, and for a minute it was very still. Then there was a bump and a jar as the boat struck the slip. The horses stamped overhead, and presently the teams all went ashore, and it was very quiet.

In a moment or two the passengers for the next trip came on board, and William climbed up the ladder and looked about. Just then a little girl, nicely and warmly dressed, came down the slip, and with dainty steps walked into the ladies' cabin. William looked at her and at her bundle of school-books, and said:

"Such a nice gal!"

There were only a few passengers, but the bell rang and the boat started, and William climbed down into the furnace-room. The bell in the engine-room rang, and he heard the engine grinding away again.

William looked at his father, half lying on a heap of warm ashes. He had dropped his pipe and was fast asleep. This would never do. If the captain should find the fireman asleep there would be trouble enough. Still, as it was his father, and as he was, no doubt, very sleepy, William decided not to wake him, but to attend to the fire himself. With an effort he managed to open the great iron door. The heat was furious, and burned his face as he looked in at the great white cavern of hot coals. It was hot work, and the heavy shovel was almost too much for him.

"Put in, Billy Staver," said he. "You'll be a fireman for yer mammy."

With a tug and a pull he managed to close the door, and then he looked up at the steam-gauge just as he had seen his father do. He counted the figures, and looked at the little black hand bobbing up and down on the dial.

"Sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety—oh! ninety-five. Ginger! she's a-goin' it."

Then he turned the three tiny cocks one after the other. Hot water should have flowed out of the two lower ones, and a jet of steam from the upper one. The top one was all right. The next gave steam. In a little fright he tried the next.

Steam!

"Ginger! crack! What's that?"

A bell rang, and the engine stopped. Then there came a terrific bump and a jar, as if the boat had run into something.

He looked at the boiler. It was leaking at every point. The hand on the steam-gauge ran up to a hundred—a hundred and five—ten—fifteen!

"Oh, Lordy! Lordy! The water's out! the water's out! She'll bu'st!" he cried, as he sprang for the iron ladder.

His father woke from his nap with a start. He rubbed his eyes and looked at the steam-gauge.

"She'll bu'st! she'll bu'st!" shouted William, as he scrambled up the ladder.

There was a sound of hurrying feet on deck, as if confusion and dismay had seized the passengers. As he came up through the hatchway Billy saw the engineer, looking as pale as a sheet, come out of the cabin.

Some one shouted, "Fire!"

With a scream to his father to "come up 'fore she bu'sted," William ran into the ladies' cabin and began to search for a life-preserver. There was not one to be—

"Oh!"

There stood the little girl with the red scarf at the door of the cabin, and crying bitterly.

"What shall I do? What shall I do? Will nobody save me?"

"Gimme yer hand!" said Billy. "They has stole the preservers, and we've got to jump for it."

Without any hesitation she took his grimy hand, and they both went out on the deck. Most of the people had gone to the end of the boat toward Boston, and the deck at the stern was quite clear. Billy led her to the edge, and said:

"See that big cake o' ice?"

"Oh! no, no. We shall drown! Isn't there a boat, little boy?"

"Yes; there's one comin' now, but she'll bust, I tell ye—the b'iler will. We must jump."

"I cannot."

"Ye must. See—now."

With a flying leap Billy sprang down upon a huge cake of floating ice that was grinding and crushing against the sides of the steamer.

"Jump now! I'll catch ye!"

Suddenly the safety-valve burst out into a terrific roar. The horses reared and neighed in fright. The people began to leap overboard or down to the ice, and a horrible confusion reigned in the boat.

"Jump!" shouted Billy. "Jump!"

A deafening crash seemed to shake the whole river. The ice seemed to sink under him, and a rush of icy water swept over him. He thought he was lost, and struck out blindly in the water. Something red floated past him.

It was the girl's scarf. He tried to reach it, and just then felt the ice rise under him. With an effort he scrambled upon the floe, and dragged the child after him.

Screams, cries, and shouts filled the air. They both stood up on the ice and looked around. A sight horrible indeed met their view. The entire stern of the steamer was gone, and into the black and ragged chasm the water was pouring in a flood.

The girl would have screamed in terror, but Billy seized her by the arm and cried:

"Run. Run. She's a-goin' down!"

And run they did over the rough and slippery ice toward East Boston. Wide cracks spread in every direction, and the black water swashed and broke in foam on every side. After leaping the cracks and running for some rods they panted for want of breath, and standing still looked back on the wreck.

The bow of the boat rose in the air. The smokestack came down with a crash. A crowd of frightened horses stood on the deck, and with a groan and a plunge the huge boat sank out of sight among the ice and water. Huge waves rolled out in every direction, and the ice snapped and cracked as it rose and fell in billows.

When the great waves had subsided the ice cake they stood upon settled down and seemed quite firm and solid. They both scrambled to their feet and looked about. The steamer had utterly disappeared, and the water was covered with broken bits of timber and the heads of scores or more of men struggling in the water among the floating ice. Where the steamer went down there was a clear space with the wreck of a deck-boat floating in the middle.

"Oh!" cried the girl. "It is awful. They will be drowned."

"Yes," said Billy, "and we, too, if——"

"Oh! what is that?" cried his companion, as the ice they stood upon seemed to sink under them, and a little wave of icy water swept over their feet.

"Look out there!—look out! You'll upset us!"

The girl looked toward the edge of the floe, and saw the head of some poor wretch in the water, and a hand clinging to the ice.

"We shall sink!" she screamed.

"Let go, you fool! She won't bear us all."

The man made no reply, but with a desperate effort tried to climb upon the ice, and under his weight it sank

deeper and deeper. It was only a small piece, a few yards square, and barely supported the children.

"Keep off, I tell you!" screamed Billy. "Float, and hang on with one hand."

The man, crazy with fear, only struggled the more, and the water swept over the children's ankles.

"Help! help!" cried the girl. "Will nobody save us?"

Her cry was not the only one raised. The struggling creature in the water screamed for help, and there was a deafening uproar.

A steamer near the Navy Yard blew her whistle in a prolonged shriek. A hundred men leaped into boats; and from the wharves at East Boston, from the ships in the stream, and from the docks at Charlestown, a score of boats were tearing through the water and crushing the rotten ice.

The man persisted in climbing on the ice, and it swayed and sank fearfully. The child screamed in abject terror, and clung to Billy in desperation.

"Git off! git off!" cried the boy. "Git off!"

In the din and uproar he was unheeded.

Seeing a stick of shattered timber floating past Billy broke away from the girl, and splashing through the water picked it up, and cried in desperation:

"Git off!—git off, or I'll kill ye!"

"Oh!" cried the girl; "oh, don't! See! the boats are coming. Oh! there's a steamer. Help! help! steamer——"

"Git off, or I'll smash yer——"

The boy seemed a little fiend. Death stared him in the face, and he did not know what he did. He made a desperate lunge at the man on the edge of the ice. Just then he slipped and sat down heavily in the water, while the timber went spinning harmlessly into the water.

Some of the boats had now reached the open water where the steamer had disappeared, and the sailors were busily rescuing the few survivors who clung to the floating ice and stray bits of wreck.

Seeing help coming, the man slid off the ice, and keeping one hand on the ice floated easily in the water. At once the ice-cake rose in the water, and with a sense of unutterable relief the children found they stood firm and dry, and were for the time quite safe.

"There!" cried Billy, laughing and crying all at once; "I toll yer so. The boats—— Hillo! we're driftin'!"

"Help, help!" screamed the girl once more.

It was true. The strong tide sweeping down Charles River was bearing them past the city and out into the harbor. The ice and the man clinging to it, and they two, were drifting helplessly on the stream. The boats gathered round the spot where the steamer went down seemed to be going away. They could no longer look up the reach of Charles River, and were floating past Battery Wharf.

"Don't be scared," cried a voice near them. They looked about, and found their fellow-voyager was resting both hands on the ice, and was eagerly looking round over the water.

"Won't they come after us?" cried the girl.

"I hope so. I am nearly—dead—with the—cold. Holler for help, both of you. Now—together!"

No need of urging. The children screamed with might and main, but not a soul seemed to heed them, and on and on they drifted, helpless and——

"Hi! hi!" cried Billy; "there's a fire in East Boston."

The man turned his head, and the girl looked around, and both saw a black column of smoke rising above the shipping in East Boston, near the South Ferry.

"Oh!" cried the girl, beginning to cry, "we shall be left. Nobody will see us now."

"Holler again," cried the man in the water, "and wave something—wave yer handkerchief, miss."

She said, in despair:

"I've lost it. Oh! what shall—— Oh! I know."

With a wrench she tore off her red scarf, and Billy, comprehending the situation, seized it and began to wave it in the air.

Suddenly he dropped it, and stood staring over toward the city, where Long Wharf was just coming into sight, and at the same instant over the water came the jangle and clash of the fire alarm bells.

"Mercy! What is that?" cried the girl. Turning round they saw one of the East Boston ferry-boats close upon them.

"Saved! Saved!" cried the man, clinging to the ice.

"There she comes!" cried Billy, in ecstasy, and dancing about on the ice.

"What?" cried the girl.

"The fire-boat. The 'Flanders.' See how she spins."

"She'll save us!"

"Boy a-hoy!" cried several voices near by, and almost before they knew it the huge ferry-boat was close upon them, and a hundred heads and hands were stretched out to rescue them.

"Thank Heaven!" cried the man in the water, "we're saved!"

But were they? With all their eagerness to help not a man on the steamer seemed to know what to do. The boat was too high out of water for them to climb up from the ice. And from the frantic actions of the sailors on the hurricane deck it was evident that one wretched life-boat was useless or could not be launched.

The girl began to cry bitterly, and the man in the water groaned. But Billy stood silently watching the fire-boat plowing through the water toward the fire and leaving a black trail of smoke behind her. Would she come to the rescue? Ah! yes, and almost before they could understand what had happened her iron bows bumped gently into the ice floe. In a moment more all three stood on her deck, and a round of cheers went up from the crowded ferry-boat.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRE-BOAT.

The water boiled up under her stern, and the "William H. Flanders" fire-boat started ahead again. The cake of ice bumped and crashed along her iron sides and with a loud snap broke into several pieces. As the three stood on the deck safe and thankful they looked at the raft that had floated them away from death. Billy was silent, and the man, dripping with water, simply said:

"Thank Heaven! It was a narrow escape."

As the ice broke up the girl shivered, closed her eyes, and fainted dead away on the deck. There was a stout man in a cloth cap with gold letters on the front, and a thin, wiry young man, who seemed to be a sailor, standing on the deck.

"Pick her up," said the officer. "Take her to the captain's room. Poor gal! I should a-thought it would ha' killed her."

Billy and the sailor took her carefully up in their arms, carried her to the stern, and opening a door in the house on deck stepped into the captain's state-room. At the same time their companion climbed down the steps into the men's quarters to dry his dripping clothes.

Meanwhile the boat went rushing on toward the black column of smoke rising above the masts of the ships clustered round the South Ferry.

If Billy had arrived in heaven he could not have been more astonished. Born and brought up in the most abject poverty he had never seen nor imagined anything so warm, bright, and comfortable as the little cabin. Small time for thought. The pale, helpless child demanded his who'e attention. Drawing the curtain one side they laid her on one of the clean white beds.

"Take off her shoes, bub, while I get a blanket."

With awkward fingers Billy tried to untie one of the dainty shoes now so wet and soiled. Such a pretty shoe. He was troubled and confused. What if she should wake up? What would she say to such a little ragamuffin as he with his dirty fingers, wet and cold as ice, touching her foot?

She did not move, and with a little effort he pulled off her rubber shoes and stood holding them in his grimy hands in a sort of amazed wonder at his audacity. The man suddenly burst into the cabin, flung a thick blanket at Billy's feet, and said, hurriedly:

"Cover her up, sonny, and keep her warm. There is an awful fire, and you must stay and take care of her."

"Fire!" cried Billy. "Fire! Can't I go and see the machine?"

"No. You stay and mind the gal."

With a slam of the door the man disappeared. Stepping to a little window Billy looked out. Nothing could be seen but the swift moving water and blinding cloud of smoke that covered everything from sight.

"Hooky! It's a big——"

A little sigh caused him to turn his head. The young girl lay on her side staring with wide-open eyes at him.

"Where am I?" said she, in a whisper.

Billy hastily caught up the blanket and threw it over her. She pushed it away, and sat up in the berth.

"Where am I? Where's mother?"

"I dunno," said Billy. "You better lie down and——"

Just here there was a single stroke on a bell that seemed close over their heads, and with a jar the boat stopped suddenly.

"Mercy! what is that? Say, little boy, where is this? Can't I go home?"

"It ain't nuffen. The boat's stopped."

Here it suddenly grew very dark, and at the same instant the engine started again. There was a sound of footsteps on deck, and voices and loud commands.

"What is it?" said the girl, beginning to cry.

"It's only a fire," said Billy, trying to pacify her.

"A fire! Oh, where is it. Is the ferry-boat on fire?"

"No. It is on shore."

"Where?"

"In East Boston."

"Oh, let me get up. I must go home. Mother will——"

Just here a bright glare of red light shone in the window, and the roar of the machinery became terrific. The boat seemed to shake with the motion of the engine.

"No," cried Billy. "You just keep still. You can't go ashore now. It's safe here, and bimeby perhaps we'll git ashore."

She would not be comforted, and springing from the berth she ran to the little window. Nothing to be seen but black smoke covering the water. She turned away, and Billy found she was crying bitterly.

"'Tain't nuffin. We's all right. Don't yer cry now. We were picked up by the fire-boat as she was a-going to the fire, and in course we had ter go, too."

She sat down on a stool and cried as if her heart would break.

Billy was quite upset. What to do he did not know, and sitting down on the floor he studied his wretched boots, now half full of water. Dirty, ragged, wet to the skin, he felt pretty bad. The misery of his situation was only made worse by the sorrow of his companion. The uproar of the fire, the jar and din of the engine, the motion of the steamer on the water, made him nearly beside himself. If he could only get out of the cabin and get near the fire he could dry himself, and get warm.

Presently the girl stopped crying, and said:

"Little boy, can't you take me to a fire where I can dry my clothes?"

"Yes. But we can't get ashore to the fire, and if we did the perlice——"

"I don't mean that. I mean to the stove. Can't we go to the kitchen fire?"

"I dunno."

"I'm very wet, and I shall take cold."

"Couldn't yer go to bed?" said Billy.

"Where?"

"Why, here. Them's awful nice beds, and you'd get warm quick."

"Oh, I shouldn't want to do that."

"Yes, ye could. We put ye on the bed when we fetched ye in."

The girl fairly laughed, and Billy felt better.

"But will you call me as soon as we get ashore?"

"Yes, I will," said Billy, glad to escape. "Ye just get warm, and I'll keep watch, ye know?"

"Thank you, little boy. Say, what is your name?"

"Billy Staver."

"Billy Staver? What a queer name. Where do you live, Billy Staver, and what does your father do?"

"We lives in Bennett street, me and dad—only—well, you see, I's not sure I've got a dad now."

The girl opened her eyes wide.

"Why not?"

"Specks he was blowed up."

"How?"

"On the ferry. Don't ye 'member? She sunk."

"And didn't he jump on to the ice, too?"

"No," said Billy, solemnly. "He was blowed up with the horses and things."

"Poor little boy. I'm so sorry for you. What was that?"

Just at that instant a tremendous crash was heard outside. Billy started up, and cried:

"The wall's fell."

"It is an awful fire," said the girl. "What will happen next?"

"I dunno," said Billy, gazing out the window. "It's a big fire. I good mine ter go out."

"Yes, do, and I'll lie down and get warm before I take cold. You will call me, won't you, Billy?"

"Yes, I will, miss," and glad to escape he opened the cabin door and stepped out on the deck.

Feeling very cold, and finding he could do nothing, he crept down an open hatchway, and found himself in a cozy cabin under the deck. It was dark, and for a moment he could not make out where he was. The engine thundered, and he was for scrambling on deck again when somebody spoke. In the uproar he could not make out what it was, and looked round to see who was there.

"Hullo, bub. Come down to dry yourself?"

"Yes'r," said Billy, "and who be you?"

"Don't you remember me? I was on the ice with you. I warmed up a bit and one of the firemen let me put on some of his dry clothes."

"Dry yourself! Where's the fire? I'm awful wet and cold."

The man pointed to a narrow door, and Billy went in and found himself in a strange maze of machinery—pumps and engines all working at furious speed and with horrid din. A bright glow of light showed where the furnace stood, and pushing on he came to a huge upright boiler where a man was busily shoveling coal into the raging furnace.

He paid no heed to Billy, and went on shoveling the coal hastily. Presently he stopped and shut the door with a bang.

"Say, mister, may I warm myself a bit?"

"Well, boy, where did you come from? We don't allow boys on the boat."

"I was picked up."

"Oh, yes, the boat did stop for something. I thought there was only a man and a girl."

"Yes'r, and me, too," said Billy, spreading his hands before the black boiler.

For a moment the man stood leaning on his shovel in silence, and Billy stared at the bright face of the steam-gauge with its little trembling hand pointing among the nineties.

Billy felt called upon to say something, and speaking up above the roar of the engine, he said:

"She's a hummin'."

"Yes," said the man, turning the try-cocks one at a time. Then he paused a moment and seemed to watch the steam-gauge as if thinking of something else.

"Say, boy, can you shovel coal?"

"Yes'r. I've tended a b'iler 'fore now. My dad he were fireman on the boat what bu'sted."

"That is good."

"No, 'tain't, cos, ye see, I 'speck dad was blowed up, too."

"Oh! I don't mean that. Can you tend the fire while I run up to the galley for a bit to eat?"

"Yes'r, I can, first-rate. Gim me yer shovel."

The man gave him the shovel, and then went up an iron ladder into the engine room above.

The man had hardly disappeared before there came a shout from above. There were loud commands and hurrying footsteps overhead. The bell rang suddenly, and the engine stopped. Billy wondered what had happened, but did not dare to leave his post. He had said he would tend the fire, and stay he must. He leaned on his shovel and held up one foot before the ash-pit door to drive out the clinging dampness and cold. Then he glanced at the steam-gauge, and then he gravely opened the furnace-door and let a flood of light into the little cabin and light-

ing up the shining steel of the engine that moved the boat. The steam-gauge fluttered among the hundreds, and mere boy that he was he knew the draft must be reduced while the engines stopped. There was a deal of uproar and confusion on deck, and he could not guess what had happened.

Suddenly another bell rang, and the engine behind him began to turn slowly, and he felt the boat moving in the water. What had happened? Something serious or she would not be changing her position. The hand of the steam-gauge moved backward, and glancing in at the furnace to see that all was right, Billy shut the door and it was dark again.

Two bells. The engine stopped, and it was very still. What now? Then another bell struck and the fire-engine on the other side of the boiler started again with a fierce roar and rattle. Swinging open the door Billy plied the shovel and with an effort threw more coal into the raging furnace. Then he looked about for something to stand upon that he might turn the try-cocks. He could not reach them, and wondered why the fireman did not come back. Somebody ought to attend to them.

Suddenly a voice came down the hatchway:

"Hullo there! Anybody down there?"

"Yes'r, I'm here," cried Billy.

"Who are you?"

"Billy Staver."

"What? What does all this mean?"

"I'm minding the fire, sir."

A black shadow filled the hatchway, and a man came down the ladder. Billy stood by the coal-bunker, shovel in hand, till the officer came down. It was the captain.

"Hullo, sir, how came you here."

"Please, sir, I was picked up."

"Oh! you are the boy. Yes, but what are you doing down here?"

"I'm minding the fire, and please, sir, would you try her. I can't reach the try-cocks. The fireman he went——"

"Yes. The fireman is nearly killed. The mainmast of the bark fell in the wharf, and cut all the hose, and in the confusion Simons was knocked overboard."

"Yes, but if you'd just try her."

The captain tried the three cocks in silence, and then turned an iron bar and the steam pump started, though it seemed to work in silence so great was the noise caused by the engines on the other side of the boiler.

"You're not a fool, boy."

"No," said Billy. "I'm not. My dad—he was blowed up—he was a fireman, and——"

"You know all about it?"

"Yes'r, I does."

"It's lucky; for Simons is hurt bad. Can you tend the fire a bit till I can get help from the shore?"

"Yes'r, I can."

"All right, bub. I'll send a man down at once."

In all Billy's experience nothing like this had ever happened. Neglected, poor, kicked, and cuffed about in the world, he had never experienced anything but the roughest usage. That he should be trusted to tend the boiler in the fire-boat was something past belief, and in spite of the experience of the day he wished he was a fireman and could work on such a splendid machine. It would be real fun to tend the fire and live on the boat all that time, and——

Just here a fireman came in from the cabin beyond the engine. He was wet, grimy with soot, and seemed almost dead with fatigue. The moment he saw Billy he held up his black hands in amazement, and shouted something above the roar of the engine.

Billy couldn't understand, and with the shovel he opened the furnace door and looked in. Seeing the fire was clogging up with cinders he took down a big poker, twice as long as himself, and prepared to stir up the fire.

In silence the man took the poker away, and pointing up the iron ladder gave Billy to understand that he would attend to the fire, and that Billy might go on deck. Billy was not very anxious to go, but remembering the child up stairs in the captain's state-room he decided to go up and see how she was getting on.

At the top of the ladder he found himself in the engine-

room, where the engineer sat on a bench idly watching his engine. Seeing Billy the man pointed out the door, and said:

"Clear out. We don't allow boys here."

"Yes'r," said Billy. "I's goin'."

Stepping out on deck he looked about, and was surprised to find a number of boats gathered round the steamer ready to pick up anything valuable that floated away from the burning ships and warehouses. Going along the deck he came to a boat hauled up alongside the steamer, and in it he saw the girl that he had left in the captain's state-room. There were two men in the boat and another was just climbing in. It was the man that had been saved with them from the wreck. Where were they going? What did it mean?

Suddenly the girl saw him, and beckoned to him to come into the boat.

He went to the side and cried:

"Hold on! Can't ye take me, too?"

"Hullo! There's the boy!" said the man in the boat.

"Come, sonny, I've hired a boat to take us ashore."

Should he go? Why not stay and watch the fire? It was fun. The masts of the ships had fallen, and the roof of the great warehouse had disappeared. It was a jolly great fire, and—then he thought of his father and the wreck, and he gladly slipped into the boat just as it pushed off.

In a moment or two they were out in the stream. The tide had swept the ice away, and a bitterly cold wind was blowing down from the snow-covered hills behind Chelsea. The boat soon cleared the wharves, and crept along to the east till they came to the Cunard Dock, where a monster steamship lay, big and black, in the water. Shooting in past her steep sides they found a ladder, and all three climbed up and stood safe and sound once more on firm, dry land. The man paid the boatman, and in silence the girl, now looking pale and frightened, the man, tall, dirty, and wet, and the forlorn and ragged Billy walked out of the yard and stood in the bleak and snowy streets of East Boston, close to the great gate of the Grand Junction Railroad freight-yard.

What was to be done next? The fire still raged, and crowds of people filled the streets all about them. The South Ferry was closed, and to return to the city they must walk round the fire, through the side streets, till they came to the North Ferry, which was probably still running.

Splashing through the pools of half frozen water, stumbling over lines of hose, and pushing through the crowds, they plodded on in silence till they reached Maverick square. As they turned into the long street that leads to the North Ferry the girl gave a sudden scream of delight, and darted away toward a carriage coming from the direction of the Maverick House.

"Run, bub!" said the man. "We mustn't lose the gal."

Billy needed no urging, and scrambled through the snow as fast as his big rubber boots would let him.

The carriage stopped suddenly. The door was thrown open, and the girl sprang in just as Billy landed on the slippery sidewalk beside the horses.

There was a gentleman and lady inside, and they seemed quite beside themselves with joy. The lady held the child in her arms and cried.

"Mamma! mamma!" cried the girl.

"Thank Heaven!" said the woman. "We thought you were dead. We heard some of the survivors were landed in East Boston, and we drove over for you, and here you are, you blessed child!"

Billy heard all this, and guessed it must be the child's father and mother. Anyway she was all right now, and he could go home himself and see where his own father was, or if he was alive at all. He would just speak to the little girl, and then——

"Clear out, you young brat!" said the coachman. Keep your hands off the hack."

The whip snapped ominously about his ears, and dodging a cutting blow he crept back toward the buildings, and in a moment the door was shut with a bang and the carriage was gone.

"Hooky!" said Billy. "They was awful mean folks any

way. I'll get home now, for I'm awful hungry, and dad——"

Had he any dad now? Was the cross old man whom he knew as his father living? He must go right——

"Hello! where's the other feller? Gone! Well, he wan't much any way, and he nearly upshot the ice."

Here was the ferry. He would now cross over to the city.

"Two cents, boy."

"Please, mister, I haven't any money."

"Clear out, then!" growled the gate-man.

Billy turned back, faint with cold and hunger, and stood leaning against the fence, while the crowds of people hurried past into the ferry-boat. What was he to do now? Of all his troubles this was the greatest. How he was to get home he did not know, and in spite of himself the big tears began to run down his face and to freeze on the collar of his ragged old coat.

CHAPTER III.

THE ELSIE SAILS AWAY WITH BILLY.

After a series of trials Billy at last, on the day after the explosion on the ferry-boat, reached his miserable home, to find that the landlord had taken what few things the room contained and disposed of them for the rent. Billy also learned that his father had been killed in the explosion, and he resolved to find his father's brother, who was captain of the tug-boat *Jessie*, which sometimes lay at T wharf. Billy reached the wharf, and walked along the end of the pier and tried to read the names of the boats. Some he could understand, and others puzzled him, but he saw enough to know that none spelled "*Jessie*" unless it was the outside boat, whose name he could not read. Seeing a man on one of the boats he asked him if the *Jessie* was in. The man only shook his head, and pointed up at a sign on the building:

"Tow Boat Office."

Yes; he ought to go there. Finding a wooden stair-way on the side of the building he mounted the steep steps and came to a small counting room, with windows looking down on the boats and out on the harbor. There was a young man writing at a desk, and several men who looked as if they might be sailors or seafaring people, sitting by the stove.

"Well, bub?" said the man at the desk, without looking up.

"Please, sir, I want my uncle."

The men all laughed, and Billy, seeing his blunder, added:

"His name's Staver—Captain James Staver. His boat's the *Jessie*."

"He's not here. He has gone to the wreck."

"What wreck?" said Billy, in alarm.

"The *Sappho*, in Portland harbor. He won't be back for a week."

This was too much. What was he to do now? This was his last hope.

Utterly dismayed at the turn affairs had taken, he turned and went out of the office without saying a single word. The cold wind blew in his face as he went down the open stair-way, and it did seem as if the whole world had turned upside down and frozen up solid forever and ever.

Hardly knowing where he was going or what he was about, he turned mechanically at the foot of the steps and walked down to the end of the wharf.

Presently he saw a door open in the house on one of the tug-boats. How nice it would be to go in there and get warm. Perhaps the man was clever and would let him get warm.

Stepping down on the deck of the first boat he crossed over, and by dint of jumping from one to the other, he reached the outermost boat of all. Seeing a man sitting at the door in the house he said, timidly:

"Please, mister, may I come in and warm me?"

The man made way for him, and Billy stepped into a small cabin that proved to be the engine-room of the steamer. There was a nice cushioned bench, and a small stove with a fire in it. Billy sat down on the bench.

Presently the warmth of the room thawed him out and

the world began to look fairer. Perhaps this uncle would come back soon, and——

"Have you seen the *Herald*?" said a young man, putting his head in the door.

The man seated on the bench said:

"No."

"Mighty queer story in it. Lemme read it to yer."

"Do. Come in and sit down."

The young man came in, and sitting down, took out a tumbled newspaper and began to read aloud:

"Among the singular incidents of the recent appalling disaster at the Chelsea Ferry was the miraculous escape of Miss Susie Proctor, daughter of Mr. Joseph Proctor, of Chelsea. It was first thought she was drowned, but it seems that through the aid of a small boy, the son of the fireman of the ill-fated boat, she escaped to the floating ice, and was picked up and afterward landed in East Boston. Her parents were nearly distracted at their loss, and the joy at her recovery may be imagined. Every effort is now being made to——"

"Why," said Billy, starting up, "that's me."

"Me!" said both men. "Who's me? Who are you, anyway?"

"I picked up that gal, I did."

"You? What's your name and how came you here?"

"My name's William Staver. It was my father that was bu'sted up."

"Staver! Is your Uncle James Staver of the *Jessie*?"

"Yes-ur. I was a-looking for him just now. Do you know where he is?"

"No; but I know that they are looking for you sharp everywhere, and the police have had instructions——"

"Oh, Lordy! Lordy! save me! There's one now!" cried Billy, pointing through the open door at an officer standing on the wharf. "Don't let him take me!"

In terror the poor child crouched down on the floor out of sight.

"He sha'n't touch yer. Wait a bit. Let's see what he wants."

The policeman was talking with some one standing on the deck of the first boat.

It was too far away to hear what was said, and they waited to see what would happen.

The policeman seemed to be very anxious to find some one, but the man on the boat only shook his head as if he did not know anything about it. Just then a window was opened in the office in the second story of the building, and some one threw a letter down on the deck of the first boat. The man picked it up and then walked over the boats till he came to the one where Billy sat on the floor of the engine-room.

One of the men went to the door and spoke to the man. Billy heard him ask what the officer wanted, but it did not appear to be of much consequence. He only wanted to know when the *Jessie* would come back. He really wanted to find our hero, Billy, but as he did not ask directly for him, he escaped; though at the name *Jessie* he was thoroughly frightened, and crept closer to the other side of the door, out of sight of the dreadful officer standing on the dock.

Suddenly the bell struck, and springing up, the engineer started the engine. The young man went out hastily, and Billy felt the boat start and move. What did it mean? Where were they going? At any other time he would have started up and made his way to the shore before he was carried off he knew not where.

Just now he did not care. If the boat only carried him out of the reach of that dreadful policeman it was all he wanted. As things were he might as well be afloat as ashore. With the greatest satisfaction he saw the shore and the houses and steamships all glide away, and presently he could look out on the briny water and look far up the South Cove toward South Boston.

Seeing that he was safely off, he ventured to ask the engineer where they were going.

"I don't know. Down the bay somewhere."

"When will we come back?"

"I haven't an idea. Perhaps not till morning. Here, bub, now that you are in for the voyage, you must make yourself useful and earn your passage."

This was too splendid.

"Oh, I can," cried Billy. "I'd like ter work on the boat. I can shovel coal, I can, and——"

"Well, well, you just go to the wheel-house and ask the captain where we are going."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir; I will right off."

Delighted to think that he could find something to do, and with a great hope in his heart that perhaps the captain would let him stay on the boat all night, he went out on the deck to go to the wheel-house.

He was not tall enough to reach the handle of the wheel-house door, so he pounded it with his fist. It was opened from the inside, and a short, round-faced man looked out. He was a clever-looking man, with bright black eyes, and a smile round his fat mouth.

"Hallo, sir. Who are you?"

"I'm William Staver, sir, and if you please, sir, the engineer he wants to know where you are bound."

"We're bound to Minot's. Give us your hand, bub, and climb up out of the cold."

Billy offered one of his grimy paws, and with a spring and a jump he landed in the little wheel-house.

"Take a seat, Master Staver," said the jolly captain.

Billy sat down, wondering why he should be called Master Staver.

"Are you any relation of Captain Staver, of the Jessie?"

"Yes, sir. He's my uncle. Do you know him, 'cause I want to find him?"

"Yes, I know him very well. We've sailed many a time together."

"Won't he be back bimeby?"

"Yes. Why, do wish to see him?"

"Please, sir, I ain't got no father now—he was bu'sted up, you know—and I haven't any home——"

"Your father was bu'sted! What was that?"

"He was blowed up in the ferry-boat."

"You don't say! And are you the boy everybody is talking about? Did you save the gal from the wreck?"

"I don't know. There was a gal on the ice with me; and if you please, sir, don't you think uncle will be back soon, 'cause you see I ain't got no where to live."

"Never you mind about that. You can stay on the Elsie till he returns."

"The Elsie! What's that?"

"This boat is called the Elsie."

"Oh!" Then he added, after a pause: "She's a bu'ster!"

"Now, sonny, you go back to the engineer and tell him that we are bound for Minot's to look for a disabled steamer. Tell him the weather looks bad and that the caution flag's a-flying."

Delighted to be of use and glad to be sure of a roof over his head, Billy went down to the deck to look for the engineer. For one night at least he was safe and sheltered, even if it was in a tug-boat going down Boston Harbor and with a stormy night coming on.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORM IN BOSTON BAY.

Everybody was reading about it and wondering who William Staver could be. If there was any one person who was very much wanted in Boston that night it was that same William Staver. The police were on the lookout; everybody was on the lookout, but not a soul in the whole city knew where he was or what had become of him.

In the meantime the Elsie was rapidly making her way down the harbor toward the open sea.

Billy came out of the wheel-house, and walked along the narrow strip of deck between the house and the low guard next the water. He found the upper half of the door of the engine-room open, and looking in found a young man sitting on the bench before the engine.

"Where's the engineer?" said Billy.

"He's at supper down below."

"Where's that?"

"For'ard."

Supper. That was a good idea. He would like some supper himself. He must find the engineer. Perhaps he would ask him to have supper, too—and perhaps he

wouldn't. Billy paused a moment and looked out over the gray, tumbling water and at the lights just beginning to show at South Boston, and wondered what he had better do. He did want some of that supper, but dared not ask for it. Was he not a "stowaway" on the steamer, an intruder where he was not wanted? Had he not come uninvited on this voyage? Somehow the world looked very black and cold, and he was only a poor, forlorn little boy without a friend in the——

Just here the wheel-house door opened, and the jolly face of the captain appeared before him.

"Hello, Billy! You're a fine sailor. You mustn't shirk yer rations. Call all hands, my hearty. Supper's ready below."

Billy actually laughed. He couldn't remember that he had ever laughed before in his life, and he was greatly surprised at himself. The captain beckoned and pointed to a hatchway just in front of the wheel-house. Some one pushed back the hatch from below, and looking down Billy saw a snug little fore-castle with a white table-cloth, a lamp, and a royal supper. It required some effort to get his little legs over the edge of the hatch, and his big rubber boots would stick all over the stairs in a manner that was very distracting. At last he got down, though he nearly upset a bowl of soup with the flaps of his coat.

"Sakes alive! What boots we do wear," said some one at the other side of the table.

"Here's a seat, Billy," said the engineer, making room for him on the bench in front of the bunks.

Billy squeezed himself into the seat as best he could, and pulled off his cap.

"Sakes alive! What a head we have got."

"Have some tomato soup, Billy?"

"Yes'r."

"Hold your platter."

Billy didn't see any, and thought it must be a joke, but the engineer solemnly poured some red soup out of a bowl into a saucer, and placing a big spoon in it handed it to Billy. He took it in both hands and set it on the table, and without delay he fell to eating, though the big spoon was really twice as wide as his mouth. It was hot and peppery, and a very prime kind of soup.

"Sakes alive! What an appetite we have."

Billy looked up to see who could be remarking with such freedom on his personal appearance and actions.

"Now, John, don't you worry the boy," said the engineer.

John was the young man who had read the piece out of the paper up in the engine-room.

"Oh, no, I won't—only those boots pleased me."

"I ain't got no others," said Billy, between his attacks on the soup.

"Sakes alive! Then you shall have some." So saying the young man turned to one of the bunks, and fumbling among the things piled in it, brought forth a pair of old leather slippers.

"There, me hearty, put those on after supper."

"I'll put 'em on now, sir, if yer please, for the boots is wet——"

"Wait a bit, Billy. Finish the supper first. Is the soup gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sakes alive! What a tip-top eater he is."

"Have some tea and bread, and there's the butter, and there's doughnuts in the locker."

"Say, mister, say—now," said Billy, suddenly stopping in the middle of a biscuit, "is they sugared on top?"

John laughed and clapped the slippers together like a drummer, and the engineer laughed, and said:

"Sugared on top?"

"Yes! Those doughnuts. Is they sugared on top like those in the shops?"

"Sakes alive! What a boy! Sugared on top! Give him one."

The engineer opened a locker beside one of the bunks, and took out a tin plate half full of doughnuts and cookies. He was just going to place it on the table when the table seemed to jump up in the air, and the teapot danced about and nearly upset itself.

"Steady there! What's up? It's getting bobbly."

"Take one," said the engineer.

Billy took a doughnut out of the pan and then they were put back in the locker.

Suddenly the table gave another roll and the spoon flew out of the saucer and jumped into Billy's lap.

"Steady there!"

But things wouldn't keep steady, and pulling on his cloth cap the engineer climbed up the companion ladder and disappeared. Billy here suddenly remembered that he had not delivered the captain's message and that he should do so at once.

He picked up his cap and said he must go.

"Go where? Do you think you can go ashore?"

"No—'sides I don't want ter. I want to see the engine."

"Won't you stop for the slippers?"

Yes, he would, and steadying himself as best he could, while the boat rolled this way and that, he pulled off his old rubber boots and displayed his red and wet feet in poor ragged stockings full of holes.

The young man they called John didn't say "sakes alive" this time, but taking an old towel from a locker he pulled off the child's stockings and wiped his poor little feet, and then gave him a pair of woolen socks that were a mile and a half too big.

"Never mind," said John, "they's warm and comfortable, and will keep the slippers snug."

Billy thought he had never had anything quite so splendid, and was eager to go on deck to try the shoes.

"All right. You go and see the engineer while I clear away the table."

So up the steep steps he climbed and scrambled out on the deck, only to find to his great surprise that it was pitch dark. At first he did not know where he was. He looked out over the water, but not a thing could be seen. He turned toward the wheel-house and saw a bright light inside. One window was partly open, and he could see the captain standing at the wheel and looking out into the black night. The cloud of steam puffing out of the smoke-stack looked pale and ghostly. The dash of the waves seemed to be all around him. Cautiously feeling his way along with one hand on the house he tried to find the door of the engine-room. He came to it presently, but it seemed to be fast, and he decided to go on toward the stern and so round to the other side.

What was that? Was it a fire or a star? A bright light suddenly came in sight as he reached the stern of the boat. What was it? Steadying himself by a ladder that was fastened to the house, he gazed at the bright spot of light that seemed to glow in the air before him. It couldn't be a star, for it didn't twinkle. It couldn't be a house on fire up so high in the air. Greatly wondering at the sight he walked round the house and crept along the other side of the boat. Here he was sheltered from the wind, and it did not seem so bitterly cold. He passed one door, and then came to the door of the engine-room. The upper part was open, and looking in he saw the engineer reading a book.

"Come in, Billy," said he, opening the half door.

Billy gladly entered the warm bright room, and sat down on the cushioned bench.

"Say, mister, did you know I saw a fire?"

"No. Where?"

"Behind her."

"Behind her!" said the man, rising and putting his head out the upper half the door.

Then he laughed and sat down again.

"That's the upper light you saw astern."

"Oh!"

"We're bound to Minot."

"There, now. I forgot all about it. The captain he told me to tell you and I forgot all about it. 'Specs I was real hungry and didn't 'member."

"We are going through the Narrows," said the engineer, rising and closing the door. "We shall have a rough night of it outside."

Even now the boat rolled from side to side with a slow monotonous motion, as if the sea was high and strong.

Suddenly a rough, loud voice seemed to speak right out in the room:

"Where's that boy?"

Billy was quite startled, and couldn't imagine what it meant.

The engineer went to a speaking-tube beside the door, and putting his mouth to it said:

"He's here, captain."

"All right," growled the big voice in the tube. "Give him a bunk in my room."

"There, Billy," said the engineer. "Hear what the captain says. He says you can sleep in his berth. We shall have a rough night of it, but you'll be snug in bed."

Then the engineer took up his book again, while the machinery went on with a steady clanking sound, and the good boat Elsie rushed on out into the black night and the wild, stormy sea. The bay light glowed high like a monstrous red firefly on the water as they went past, and the lower light on the outer Brewsters flashed and flashed over the inky waves. The ships had taken warning, and hid themselves behind the islands and all the wide bay between Cape Cod and Cape Ann was bare, save where a poor broken-down steamship struggled and groaned through the dark, and where a splendid bark was plowing and plunging through the waves toward that flashing light at the mouth of Boston Bay.

As for Billy, they showed him the captain's warm and cosy cabin, and the poor tired little fellow was only too glad to undress and stow himself away in the little white bed. It might storm and rave outside, he did not care. Was he not safe in the Elsie, and what harm could come to him on such a splendid sea boat?

How long he slept he did not know. He was very tired, and the motion lulled him to slumber. The steady sound of the engine served as a rude lullaby, and several hours slipped away unheeded.

Suddenly the engine stopped, and he awoke with a start. Where was he? What had happened? Then the boat rolled slightly, and though it was pitch dark he remembered where he was. For a moment he lay still and listened. Not a sound. Then he heard the splash of a wave, and again the boat rolled in the sea. Then he heard some one run past the cabin door. What had happened? He must get up and— What was that? Ah, the boat was blowing her whistle. Scrambling out of the berth, he felt about the room till he found some of his clothes, and hastily putting them on he opened the door and stepped out on the deck.

To his surprise it was wet and sloppy. A dash of cold rain blew in his face, and nearly blinded him. For a moment he could not make out where they were, and he peered around into the dark to see if land or any light was in view. Ah, what was that? A bright spot of light seemed to burn far off over the water. What could it be? Some lighthouse, perhaps. Then it became dim, and at last went out altogether. How strange.

Oh! There it was again as bright—now it grows dim again. It must be a lighthouse of some kind.

Then a black figure came along the deck, and some one called out:

"Who's there?"

"It's me," said Billy.

"Sakes alive! What are you out for? Why don't you stay abed?"

"'Cause I heard her stop. Where are we now?"

"Off Boston Light. Don't ye see it a flashin' there?"

"Oh, yes—and please, mister, what time is it, and where are we?"

"You just get back into bed again; it's no time for such small boys to be up."

Billy opened the door and crept into the cabin again. Somehow he couldn't sleep, and standing by the window he stared out into the black night and over the blacker sea. It was a horrible night, but somehow he felt perfectly safe. Was it not a fine steamer, and what harm could—

What was that? A gleam of bright light flashed over the water. Something flashed into the air, and then he saw green and red stars falling in the water. What was it? Fireworks? It couldn't be—and yet it went up just like a rocket. There! There it was again.

Without waiting to see more, he opened the door and stepped out on the wet and slippery deck. Steadying himself against the house, he ran along the deck till he came to the wheel-house. He was on the point of rapping on the door when he saw something ahead that transfixed

him on the spot. A bright green light and a red light beside it seemed to rest on the water at some distance ahead. What could it be. Some one wrapped in a big cloak stood at the bows gazing at the light. Glancing up at the wheel-house windows Billy saw the captain standing looking out over the water at the two lights. What did it mean, and—just here a huge wave broke in a torrent of foam over the bows and swept past him and drenched him through. He clung to the handle of the door till it passed, and then he called:

"Say, captain, open the door."

The man at the bows turned round, and said:

"Hello! Who's there?"

The captain put his head out the window and said:

"What's up now?"

"Oh, captain, there's a ship—a ship—a firing fireworks with red stars—rockets and——"

"Rockets! Where?" cried both the men.

"Way off astern. I seen 'em from the cabin window, and—there! There's one now!"

The man on the deck leaned over the water and looked back toward the stern. But nothing could be seen.

"Are you sure, bub. Wasn't you dreaming?"

"No. I seen 'em real plain. It's rockets just like those on the Common, Fourth of July."

"Some vessel is in distress," said the captain. "Go astern, John, and see if you can see it. We are right on the steamer now. We must attend to her first any way."

John went to the stern to look for the signals, and the captain opened the door for Billy. He was glad enough to climb in out of the rain, and at once sat down on the sofa where he could dry his feet at the register. In a moment John came running back, and reported that what Billy had said was true. Some ship was showing signals of distress. What was to be done? Here was the great ocean steamer close upon them. Her lights gleamed bright over the water. They should go to her and see if she needed help, and at the same time the ship was in perhaps greater danger, though in the darkness and storm it was impossible to say what was the matter. The captain did not hesitate long, but calling to the engineer through the speaking tube to "open her wide," he took the wheel again, and with a start and a shiver the Elsie plunged forward into the dark, and clouds of spray from her bows dashed over the deck and spattered the wheel-house windows.

CHAPTER V.

THE BURNING OF THE SHIP.

The captain drew up the windows to keep out the spray and rain. Then turning to Billy, he said:

"It's a bad night, Billy."

"Yes, I guess it is. Hello! is that clock right! It's most mornin'."

"Yes. It's nearly right. The sun will be up presently."

Then the captain looked earnestly out at the lights of the steamer, and the Elsie reared and plunged through the great waves and seemed to shake the foam and spray from her bows like some splendid horse, ready for a race. On they went through the raging water, and the lights of the steamer came nearer and nearer. All the night long the Elsie had toiled up and down in the bay looking for the steamer, and now that she was found a new call was about to be made upon her for help. Presently it seemed to be lighter, and in a few moments they came up alongside the mighty ocean steamer riding slowly over the great waves. They could make out that she had one or two sails set and was sailing by their aid, while it was plain that she was not using her engines. Her tall masts looked black against the gray in the east, and as the Elsie ranged past her she blew her whistle, and a voice called out, "Tug, ahoy!"

The captain let down a window and shouted:

"What steamer is that? Do you want help?"

"Sinfonia. Broken shaft. Which way is the tide setting?"

"Strong to the nor'ard. Can ye steer without help?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

Then a big wave seemed to lift the Elsie up in the air, and the steamer swept past, and the wind that seemed to

lull behind the shelter of the steamer blew in cold and damp at the windows.

"Now for the ship," said the captain. "The steamer can go alone for a little while, and we must see what the matter is with the vessel."

Rolling and pitching in the angry sea, the Elsie turned around and followed the steamer. It was soon light enough to see for some distance. Putting on full speed they quickly passed the laboring steamship and made for the ship that could be seen a mile or two to the southwest off Nantasket beach. She was under one or two sails, and seemed to be trying to make Boston Light. Rushing and plowing through the sea before the wind, the Elsie sped on her errand as fast as steam could drive her. It was now light enough to see plainly, but the daylight only added to the terrible aspect of the storm. It was plainly increasing, and every wave that boiled up in foam and fury under the stern of the boat seemed more threatening and dangerous. Far to the south Minot's Light stood pale and white in its robe of ice. The long line of Nantasket beach was white with foam. To the north Boston Light seemed standing in a white island of foam. Behind them the steamship labored slowly through the water. The storm seemed to increase every moment. Nothing short of the most powerful ships and steamers could live much longer in such a sea, and these two in trouble must be got into shelter as quickly as possible. Nearer and nearer they came to the ship, and then they saw to their horror a black column of smoke streaming from her bows, while at the masthead the flag was flying union down.

Billy noticed the smoke first, and standing up cried:

"Golly! captain, she's afire!"

"Sit down, Billy, sit down. We've got trouble enough now. Sit perfectly still—no, here, you run down to the fire-room, and tell the engineer and firemen to get the pump ready."

Billy, in a fever of excitement, opened the door and nearly pitched into the sea in his eagerness. At the same time the captain called to John, who stood on the deck, to get out the hose.

Here was trouble and excitement enough. Two ships in distress, with a furious storm coming on, and one of them on fire. Not another vessel in sight, and only the Elsie able to render any help whatever. The ship was in the greatest danger, and must be attended to first.

Billy staggered along the slippery deck as fast as the motion of the boat would allow, and tumbled headforemost into the engine-room. Picking himself up he cried:

"Fire! There's a fire! A ship afire! The captain says how you must get the engine—no, I mean the pump—ready, and where's the fireman?"

"He's below—down the ladder there."

Billy saw the iron ladder by the side of the engine, and quickly scrambled down and found himself in the hold. It was quite dark, and had it not been for the helping hand of the fireman he could not have found his way. The upright engine stood in the middle, but the fireman led him past it into the fire-room, where the end of the boiler made one side of the room. There were two doors, both glowing red with the fires inside while in the ash-pits showers of sparkling coals were falling down. On either side were the coal-bunkers, and in one corner stood the powerful steam-pump. To Billy the place seemed familiar enough. He had spent the best of his short life in just such a place in the old ferry-boat, where his father had been a fireman for so many years.

"Golly," said Billy; "this is a fust-rate fire-room."

"Yes," said the fireman; "it's a pretty good fire-room, only it's rather dark."

"Where's the steam-pump?" said Billy.

"That's it," said the man, pointing to a rusty, horizontal pump beside the engine.

"Will it throw a big stream?"

"It's a bu'ster!"

"Golly! Who's the hoseman?"

"Oh, John; he's hoseman; leastways he did the time the Greyhound was burned over at the Atlantic dock. That's before they had the Flanders."

"The Flanders is a bu'ster," said Billy, with enthusiasm. "She can throw—golly, how she rolls."

"Yes, she do. It's getting rough."

"Eight streams," said Billy, steadying himself as the boat rolled from side to side.

"Look out now; I must stir up the fire."

"Lemme help you," cried Billy. "I can do it fust rate. My dad—he was bu'sted up, you know—he was fireman."

"Bu'sted up?"

"Yes; on the ferry-boat."

"Oh!"

"And I can tend the fire. Give me the shovel."

"Ken ye? Well, open the door now."

Billy bravely opened the furnace door and a flood of light filled the dark and grimy place.

The fireman shoveled in the coal in silence, and Billy stood looking admiringly on.

"How much does she run?"

"'Bout ninety."

"Golly! Say, where's the try-cocks?"

"Them's um. Ken ye turn um?"

Billy thought he could, and reaching up on tip-toe he tried to turn one of the try-cocks. Just then the Elsie pitched, and Billy sprawled on his back on the floor.

"There now. Where are your sea-legs. Thought ye was a sailor?"

"So I am," cried Billy, scrambling up again; "only, you see, it's awful bobby, and——"

Suddenly the gong-bell in the engine-room struck, and the engine stopped. Then they heard loud voices and commands on deck. Some one shouted down the ladder to

"Couple on the hose there!"

Billy and the fireman sprang to catch the piece of hose hanging down the ladder, and by dragging and pulling they got enough of it to reach round the engine to the steam-pump on the floor.

Then the bell rang and the engine started again at half speed. The fireman turned to his boiler to see if all was right, tried the water, and then set the feeding-pump agoing. Billy, greatly excited by these preparations, prepared to go on deck to see the fun.

Just as he reached the engine-room he heard some one call him.

"Ay, ay, sir!" he cried, in true sailor fashion. "Coming, sir!"

In the engine-room he found the captain talking with the engineer.

"It's no use to try to save her. We must rescue the passengers and then beach her. Here, Billy, can you row?"

"Yes, sir, I can."

"That's good. Go out and help John with the boat."

He went out on the deck and the captain followed him, saying to the engineer.

"Keep her moving slowly," and to Billy, "Mind what you do, Billy, and keep cool."

Such a sight. The Elsie had come up with the vessel, and was lying close under her lee. She was a splendid ship. Full rigged and in perfect order, but a hidden fire had been gnawing for days at her cargo, and here in sight of home she was ready to perish, not from storm, but from fire. The officers and crew were on deck, and when the captain of the Elsie came out on deck they had a consultation. Could the tug take them inside? Yes, but would the fire keep under? Couldn't tell. Their fire engine was disabled. The Elsie could give them a stream, but the smoke was leaking from the hatches and the decks were hot. They might try it.

The Elsie was started up and came close alongside, but the sea was so rough and the ship rolled so much that she backed out at once and drew off a little distance.

"Throw us a line!" shouted the captain.

Once more the Elsie ran alongside and a heavy line came flying through the air and landed at the stern. Billy and John were there ready to launch the Elsie, Jr., in case a boat was needed, and catching the rope made it fast to the hose.

"Haul away there!"

And they did with a will. The hose was taken on the ship's deck and soon they heard the sailors chopping a hole in the deck.

"Play away there!"

"Play away!" shouted Billy, running to the door of the engine-room.

At once he heard the clanking of the engine, and the men cheered on the ship. In the meantime the ship and the Elsie went plunging and rolling on toward Boston Light, where they could see the disabled steamer taking a tack to stand off to sea till a pilot or the Elsie could come to her assistance.

The long black hose hung between the bark and the tug—now sagging down into the foaming water and now pulled out almost straight as either ship or boat rolled on waves.

In the meantime the wind grew stronger and stronger. The waves seemed longer and higher. As the wind was northeast and they were trying to make to the northwest, they had the full force of the sea. The ship plunged into the waves, and torrents of water poured in upon her decks. The fire smoldered just as fast, and even the hose now delivering a powerful stream through a hole in the deck seemed to do no good. They had already tried flooding the fire, and the ship was plainly sinking under the load of water that had been poured into her. The smoke still leaked from every crack in the deck, and the fate of the ship seemed sealed.

Ah! what was that? A cry of horror and alarm rose from the deck. The masts! Eaten away by the fire the foremast seemed ready to fall. As the ship rolled in the sea it swayed from side to side, and threatened to crush the deck. The Elsie started forward to escape the danger. The hose stretched, and then with a snap it parted in the middle.

John sprang to pull it in, and Billy ran to the engine room, shouting:

"Hold on! hold on! The hose's bu'sted!"

What was to be done now? The Elsie dropped astern of the ship to be out of danger. It was impossible to save the ship. The only thing to do was to save the crew and passengers, and let her go.

Some one stood up at the stern, with a speaking trumpet:

"Tug, ahoy! Come alongside and take us off. The ship's all afire!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and as a cheerful sign of help at hand the captain blew his whistle long and loud, and cheers rose from the ship's deck.

At this moment the foremast swayed more and more, and a bright light shone on the dripping rigging and on the weather-stained sails.

"Man the boat!" shouted the captain. "We can't go too near in such a sea."

"Ay, ay," said John, as he prepared to pull down the small boat that lay upside down on the house.

"Man your boats!" screamed the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir! There's two loading now. Can't you come 'longside?"

"No; the masts might fall. You must take to your boats."

Now the fire, having broken through the deck, began to roar, and clouds of black smoke swirled and rolled in the strong wind.

"Launch to windward!" shouted the captain.

"It is too late. The boats are loading now."

"Look out for the masts!"

"Man the boat!" shouted the captain, "and tow astern!"

Without delay John and Billy launched the Elsie, Jr., and with a line allowed the boat to tow astern. Could she live in such a sea? Could——

Ah! what's that? Slowly at first, then with a terrific crash, the foremast reeled, and then plunged with a splash into the sea.

The boats! Where are they? Were they crushed? The Elsie dropped astern again, and then swung ahead under the ship's lee. As they came round a sight met their view too horrible to describe. The mast had fallen across one of the boats, and the poor wretches to save themselves had sprung into the boiling sea.

"After them, John!"

It needed no second warning. John and Billy sprang into the boat and pushed off. A huge wave seemed to sweep them away, but they rowed with might and main, and, at the risk of their lives came alongside the burning ship. Struggling, fighting for life, the sailors swam for the little boat, and were one at a time taken in. Then they pulled for the Elsie, that was steaming alongside.

The other boat also put off, loaded down to the water's edge.

The fire had now run up the rigging, and was bursting from the deck in several places. The few that were left on board were crowded around the stern.

"Look out! The mainmast!"

It toppled and shook, but did not fall, and with screams and shouts the men on the ship cried that they had no more boats. So only the one ship's boat and the Elsie, Jr., were left to save the rest.

It took but a few moments for the two boats to get their loads aboard the Elsie, where the poor, half-frozen wretches were taken at once into the cabin out of the drenching rain and the storm. Two of the men remained in the ship's boat and put off again, while John and Billy followed them in the Elsie, Jr., as fast as possible. The boat was shipping water at every plunge through the seas. Billy's cap blew off, his clothes were soaked through, his feet and hands were perishing with the cold; still he clung to the heavy oar, and tugged and pulled with the best of his little strength.

"Pull away! pull away, Billy! We're almost up with her!"

"Ay, ay! I'm a—pull—in—in!" cried Billy, catching his breath between the strokes.

Now they came up under her stern, and a row of faces looked down on them from the burning ship.

"Throw us a rope!" shouted John—"throw us a rope?"

The rope dropped over the edge, and hung dangling and swaying over the water. Then a big wave rolled past, and swept them away from it. With might and main they rowed again till they came under it. Then a man slid down it, and swung to and fro over the foaming water. The boat ran under him, and he dropped lightly into the stern.

"Take the oar, man," screamed John. "The child's most dead."

With an effort Billy unclasped his stiff fingers from the oar, and tumbled over into the bows and sat down in a puddle of water.

How the fire roared. It ran along the ropes, and shot over the sails till they fell in black rags to the burning deck. Another man came down the rope.

Just as he dropped into the boat the rope was drawn suddenly away, and to their horror the ship's stern seemed to rise out of the water. With frantic haste they rowed away, leaving the rest behind. A monstrous wall of yellow water came rolling in from the sea. The Elsie, Jr., rose like a cork upon it. But the ship!

She rolled over before it. The stern rose higher and higher. The masts cracked and snapped, and pieces of the blazing spars fell into the water. The poor creatures left aboard leaped into the sea. The wave with a thundering shock broke in her sides, and in a blinding cloud of steam and spray she plunged out of sight in the foaming and boiling sea.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STEAMSHIP.

And that's all he could remember. The next thing that happened did not seem to have any connection with the sinking ship or the boat, and the storm. Some one said something about coffee. Coffee. Oh! yes—

"Have some coffee, Billy?"

Who spoke? Where was he anyway? He opened his eyes, and found that he was sitting on the floor in the captain's cabin. There was a man in each of the berths, and two big fellows lay on the floor, while the engineer was kneeling by his side and holding a cup of coffee. The Elsie here gave a lurch, and the coffee spoon danced in the cup.

"Hooky! It's bobbly, ain't it now?"

"Do you feel better, Billy?"

"Better? Have I been sick?"

"No, not exactly. You fainted away in the boat, and we put you in here. Take a drink of this, and you will feel better."

"Well, you see I didn't have any break—fast, and—my! That's just fust rate—and I guess I'll get up and—say—who's them?"

"Those are the men on the ship. They are taking a nap now——"

"Oh!—yes—the ship—she burned up. Hark—what's that?"

A dull boom seemed to 'float over the stormy waters. The men heard it, and awoke with a start.

"It's guns," said one.

"Guns!" cried Billy. "Oh! lemme get up."

"No, sit still, Billy. It's the steamer firing signals for us."

But Billy couldn't rest there, and hastily swallowing the coffee he got up and prepared to go out on deck. Somehow his little legs were stiff, and his hands were sore, but nothing would keep him in. Those guns! He must go out and see what was going on.

The engineer cautiously opened the door and held it secure while Billy crept out. Then the door closed with a slam in the fierce wind. A dash of cold rain blew in their faces. The boat seemed to reel and plunge through the surging waves as if it was but a chip on the sea. Billy clung to the house with might and main. A big wave struck the bows and came sweeping along the deck in a flood. It swept over his feet, and he was wet through in a moment.

The engineer walked along to the door of the engine-room and then went in. Billy did not care to follow. Wet as he was he meant to stay out and see what was going on. Seeing his chance when the deck was level for a moment he ran back toward the stern and round to the other side. To his surprise the Elsie, Jr., was towing behind. What had happened? Why didn't they haul her in? Passing round to the other side he was surprised to find the deck crowded with men who were trying to find shelter from the storm behind the house. What a forlorn and wretched set! They cowered down on the wet deck and seemed to be having a miserable time generally.

At sight of Billy they brightened up, and one said:

"That's 'im."

"Mighty smart boy," said another. "Say, sonny, was ye hurt much?"

"What?"

"Was ye hurt much the time the boat swamped?"

"What boat?" said Billy, drawing up to the house to keep out of the rain.

"That boat," said one man, pointing over his shoulder at the Elsie, Jr., towing astern. "Didn't ye know she was swamped, and that ye nearly got drowned, ye did?"

"No," said Billy, in amazement.

"Yes, and the fellers picked ye up and put ye in the cabin."

"Oh, that's why I was so wet, and now say, mister, where's the ship?"

"She sunk."

"No, I mean the ship what's firin' the guns."

"Oh, that's a steamer off the light'us. We's bound out to her. She's just ahead."

"I mean to go and see her," said Billy.

"All right. Pass the boy long, mates."

So they made room for him, and he crept past them toward the bows. Seeing the wheel-house door open he climbed in, and was surprised to find it full of men. They were talking among themselves and looking earnestly out through the misty windows.

"Is that you, Billy Staver?" said the captain, turning round from the wheel. "I thought you were sick after your bath."

"No; I'm fust rate now. And say, captain, what's them guns a firin' for?"

"It's the steamer. You shall see her fast enough when we come up with her. Have you had your breakfast?"

"I had some coffee."

"That's not enough. Go down in the cabin and attend to some of those cakes."

"Is they sugared on top?"

How the men all laughed!

"The doughnuts, I mean."

"Yes," replied the captain, with a laugh; "they's sugared on top."

Billy thought he would attend to them right away, and climbed down to the deck, and, holding on by both hands, crept along to the hatch. When he got there he paused a

moment to see where they were. As the boat rose on the top of a wave he saw a white tower on an island just ahead. The surf was rolling in long lines of foam over the rocks, and through the drifting clouds he caught a glimpse of a yellow hill beyond. But the sight that fixed his attention was a steamship heading toward the light-house and trying her best to enter the harbor.

To the left was another yellow hill standing sharp and ragged against the flying clouds. At the foot of the hill the breakers seemed to be tearing and rending the land to pieces. Could the steamer get in past the point? It seemed doubtful. There was no smoke from her stack. The two or three small sails spread in the wind seemed ready to burst and fly away in ribbons. The masts swayed from side to side, as if the ship rolled in every sea. The Elsie was heading for her and making a gallant effort to come to the—

Splash! And a great green wave swashed and dashed on to the deck. It swept our Billy off his feet, and in an instant he found himself sprawling on the deck in a puddle of water.

"Hello there! Where ye going?"

Some one seized him by the arm, and he felt himself dragged into the room.

"What are you doing out there?"

"Nuffin," said Billy, wringing the water out of his cap.

"I was going down to the cabin, and that wave—wasn't it a buster—just upset me."

"And now you're drenched through."

"Y-e-s, I is wet some."

"You'd better go down stairs and get dry."

"But I want to see the steamer, and I'm awful hungry."

"I'll send you something to eat."

Without a word Billy crept down the iron ladder into the fire-room. The fireman helped him past the clanking engine, and gave him a seat on a lump of coal by the great boiler. The doughnuts soon came, and with these in hand he stood before the fire and steamed himself. The steam rose in little clouds about him, so that he looked like some huge chicken being roasted before the blaze. The fireman laughed and said he was cooking fast. Billy laughed, too, and thought the doughnuts were just prime.

Suddenly the bell rang. The engine stopped, and it seemed very still. Then they heard voices on the deck. What had happened?

Stuffing a doughnut into each pocket of his ragged old coat he said he must go and see what was up.

"'Tain't nuffin," said the man. "It's only the steamer. We are going to tow her in."

"I'm going to see, any way," said Billy, and up the iron ladder he climbed and came to the engine-room. The engineer was looking out one door and the other was shut.

"Please, mister, I want ter see."

"There's not much to see. The steamer is going to give us a tow line."

Then some one called outside, and the bell rang to start the engine. He couldn't wait any longer. He must go out and see what was going on. Enough to see, certainly. They had come up with the steamship, and were right under her lee. She was a monster ship, and the Elsie looked like some little water-rat beside her. The steamship was heading to the north, toward Boston Light, which was now only about a mile away. She was close in shore—off Point Alerton. Too near for safety. The surf was beating in fury on the beach, and the sea-wall seemed half buried in the foam and flying spray. How the great ship rolled! Now they could see all the people on the deck, and then she rolled the other way, and her black sides seemed almost as high as a house.

Billy went to the stern, where he could get a good view, and stood behind the house out of the rain. How the wind roared and whistled in the ship's rigging. And to think this great steamship, that looked so strong, was nearly helpless. Her engine broken and her fires out! Nothing but the brown sails to save her from the black rocks and the horrible white sands of Point Alerton and wild Nantasket Beach, where many good ships had laid down their bones.

The Elsie was now nearly opposite her bows, and Billy saw the men on deck running along as if in great excitement. Two of the hands on the Elsie came out where

Billy stood, and a tall sailor with a coil of rope in his hand stood on the bows of the steamship. She buried her bows in a foaming wave, and then rose high in the air till the red water-line came up into sight. The Elsie, pitching and plunging in the sea, pushed close up to the steamship. The sailor on her bows stood like a statue in the wild wind and blinding rain. Down she plunged with a heavy roll in another great wave, and then as she rose again the rope came flying through the air toward the Elsie, just where our Billy stood. The men sprang to catch it, and Billy instinctively put out his hands to help. It flew over their heads and coiled on the deck like a brown snake. It fell at Billy's feet, and he dropped upon it and clung to it tight with both hands.

The Elsie lurched at the same instant, and in a moment our Billy was dragged with a terrible jerk into the sea. With a desperate clutch he hung on to the rope, and went down and down into the freezing water. It swept over his head and roared in his ears. He had the wit to shut his mouth and to cling to the rope with the energy of despair.

Ah! Then there was confusion and uproar!

"Man overboard! man overboard!"

Billy clung to the rope through it all. It pulled and strained and nearly dragged his arms out of his shoulders. The ship rose on another wave, and he found himself dangling in the air under the ship's bows. She rolled again, and he swung against her iron sides with a terrific bang that made him scream with pain. Then the green water swept up to him again, and with a gasp he went in once more deep under the foamy ocean. He was chilled through in an instant, but clung to the rope in desperation. It was his only chance. Up again out of the water. He saw the Elsie snorting and puffing to come up with him, and—

Oh! what a terrible blow again as he swung against the ship! They were pulling him up. Another foaming wave swept like lightning under him, but it only touched his feet this time. How the rope pulled and strained. It was tearing his very fingers out. He couldn't hold on much longer.

Stout hands had hold of the other end. A dozen men pulled with might and main. A row of faces looked over the edge of the bulwark, and hands and arms were stretched out to rescue him. In a moment his bare head came up level with the deck. They took his little red hands and seized him by his old ragged coat, and with a cheer he flew heels over head on to the deck. How they cheered! They hurrahed and hurrahed, and the Elsie blew her whistle, and everybody acted like mad.

The rain fell in torrents, and the great ship reeled and plunged into the sea, but nobody seemed to mind it. They shook Billy by the hand, and cheered again, and had an uproariously jolly time generally.

But the ship! What of her? Where was she going? A big officer in a gold lace cap took Billy's hand, and led him away toward the cabin, and the boatswain's whistle piped up above the roar of the sea and the scream of the fierce wind.

Again the tall sailor threw the rope to the Elsie. It was caught this time by some one beside a boy. A tow line was quickly run out, and with a full head of steam on, the Elsie plunged ahead toward Boston Light.

It was none too soon. The rocks on the shore seemed to grow nearer and nearer. Unless she could pull fast she was lost. Could the little Elsie, that seemed such a mere pleasure-boat beside the giant steamer, save her? The ship, big as she was, could hardly help herself. The situation was critical, and the officers looked grave, and the great crowd of men on deck looked at the yellow banks on the shore, and at the long lines of foaming surf, and were silent. When people stop talking on a ship there is trouble.

It was a close race for life. If the Elsie could drag the steamship half a mile farther all was safe, and they could enter the harbor without any trouble. The Elsie pulled the heavy rope out to its full length. It tightened and strained, and the drops of water dripped from it in a little shower. Down it went into the sea, and then it straightened out again stiff and taut. The Elsie seemed to tear up the sea with her propeller, and black clouds of smoke poured out of her stack. At first the steamship did not

seem to move, and the Elsie stood stock still, puffing and smoking like a wild thing.

The ship rolled and rolled in the sea, and the black rope strained as if it was ready to part. Slowly she seemed to drift sideways toward the shore. Then she moved a little and her bows turned a point or two toward the east. The boatswain's whistle piped loud and shrill, and a dozen men ran up the rigging to take in sail. She was coming up into the wind. She was safe. The Elsie had mastered her. The mighty steamship moved slowly ahead. The little tow-boat, that seemed such a speck on the water, was equal to the task. Let the wild sea beat on cruel Nantasket. Let the surges trample on the stones of Point Alerton. The men on deck gave three cheers, and the Elsie blew her whistle and plunged ahead, dragging her tremendous load slowly after her. The keeper at the Light blew his great fog-horn, and all the people in the cabin heard it, and were glad.

Billy heard it, too. Poor little fellow! He had seen rough times, but they were most over. He had tried to do his duty, and had been nearly killed in doing it. The officer led him into the cabin, and a great crowd of ladies and gentlemen gathered round him. Such a splendid little fellow. They couldn't do too much for him.

Poor boy, he has had a stormy time of it, but he is almost in port, and the storm is just clearing away.

They said so on deck as the stout little Elsie towed them in over the foaming seas into the harbor, for far away in the north it looked light and broken as if the sun was just ready to come out. The storm was nearly over.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE STATION HOUSE.

Then a lady took Billy by the hand and asked him if he wouldn't like some dry clothes and something to eat. She had two boys, and they would be glad to give him some nice warm things.

Then six other ladies said they must give him something. One wanted him to go to her state-room, and another said her trunks were not packed and that there were plenty of things for the child. He couldn't go with them all, so he followed the lady who spoke first, and they went into one of the state-rooms.

Such a beautiful place. There were two nice beds and a sofa, and a carpet, and a big trunk with brass nails. And such things as the lady brought out of that trunk! She laid them all on the bed, stockings and drawers, and such very short pants and such jackets. Really he had never seen the like. Then she gave him a towel and a sponge, and some water, and left him to dress. It did not take long, for he was anxious to go out and attend to that dinner that they had promised him. Some of the clothes were rather queer, and he didn't know how to manage them. At last he got them all on, and opened the door to go out into the saloon.

What was the matter? They all laughed as quick as he came out. To be sure the pants only came to the knee, and the stockings were rather short, so that his shining white legs were bare. Oh, that wasn't the way. So the lady took him back again and gave him long, brown stockings, that came above the knee. Ah, that was the style.

"Well, now, that was just funny. Say, now, wasn't it?" "Too funny for anything, Johnny. Is Johnny your name?"

"No, mum. My name's Billy."

"Master Billy. You look well, Master Billy. Now let us go out and attend to that lunch."

"Thank'e, mum. The stockings was funny, wasn't they? These are good and long—and, oh, I haven't any shoes."

"To be sure. Perhaps we can get some outside."

Then they went out into the saloon. A nice little girl brought him a pair of shoes that were just a fit. There was a place set at one of the tables, and the lady gave him a seat and all the rest of the folks gathered round to see the hero of the tow rope in his new clothes.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the lady, "this is Master Billy."

Then they all laughed, and one of the ladies kissed him.

Billy had never been kissed in his life, and didn't know how to take it, and the kiss landed on the end of his thin little nose.

Then they all laughed again, and it began to be very merry indeed. One lady sat down on one side and another on the other. Some pretty little girls sat on the other side of the table, and the gentlemen stood round the outside. Somehow the ship didn't seem to roll much now, and the man who brought the plate of soup carried it steady enough.

As for Billy, he didn't quite know what to do, and was glad when the things came, though really the silver spoon was twice too big for his mouth.

Pretty soon he felt better, and they all began to talk again.

"What is your name, sir?"

"Billy Staver."

"Where do you live, Billy Staver?"

"I don't live anywhere now."

"Have you no father or mother?"

"No; mother's dead, and father he was bu'sted up."

"Bu'sted up! What is that?"

"Blowed up—time the ferry-boat bu'sted her b'iler."

"What ferry-boat was it, and were you there?"

"Yes—I knew she'd bu'st, and I just jumped overboard onto a cake o' ice—me and a gal, and the Flanders she picked us up."

"How interesting! What was the girl's name?"

"I don't know—I forget—and, well, she was a nice gal, and she looked just like that gal with the thing in her hair."

Everybody looked over the table to where a young miss with a velvet bow in her hair sat by the table.

"Was she a little girl like Miss Proctor?"

"Proctor!" said Billy; "that's it. I heard a feller read about it in the *Eerald*, and that was the name."

How wonderful! Really, this was very interesting. And everybody began to talk as fast as they could, and Billy was nearly distracted with questions about the girl on the ice, and how old she was, and all about it.

But Billy wouldn't listen to anything. He wanted to go out on deck and see the Elsie.

Then they all laughed again, and declared that he was a truly remarkable boy. One of the ladies gave him a nice cloth cap, and then they led him out on the deck.

They were fast approaching the city. They had passed the Castle and were abreast the iron works at South Boston. The sailors on deck were busy dragging the passengers' trunks from the hold, and things were pretty lively. In a few moments they would drop anchor in the stream, and the voyage that had so nearly ended in disaster would be finished. The captain of the steamship invited Billy into the wheel-house and asked him a great many questions as to where he lived, and to whom he belonged, and Billy told him everything, not omitting to tell how his father was "bu'sted up." The captain was greatly pleased, and asked Billy if he would not like to live on the *Sinfonia* all the time, and have a place on the steamship. They gave good wages, and the work was not hard.

But, no, Billy preferred the Elsie.

The captain laughed, and then he took from a drawer five gold sovereigns, and gave them to Billy as a reward for his bravery in trying to catch the tow-line in the storm.

Billy had never seen that kind of money before, and was greatly pleased with it. Then they went on deck again. The ship had come to anchor in the stream between the East Boston ferries, and he was once more back in Boston. The Elsie had hauled up alongside and the passengers were preparing to go ashore. The *Camilla* and the *Emily*, two other tugs, were also alongside and everybody was as busy as they could be getting the mails and the passengers into the boats.

The ladies and gentlemen crowded round Billy, and bade him good-by. Two ladies kissed him, and one gentleman took him one side and asked him a great many questions about the explosion on the ferry-boat, and ended by giving Billy a card on which was written in pencil:

"WILLIAM R. PROCTOR,

"Chelsea, Mass."

"And, Billy, if you want any help at any time, send for me. That card will tell you where to find me. If I can make out your story we are under great obligation to you, and both my brother and I will be glad to help you."

Billy couldn't really understand what it all meant. He put the card in his pocket with the gold sovereigns, and said he should remember it. He couldn't think of anything else to say.

Then the passengers all went ashore in the Elsie, and the two other boats, and the brave Billy went, too, at the place of honor in the wheel-house of the Elsie.

They landed at the Cunard Dock at East Boston. The ladies again bade him good-by, and he was once more alone with Captain Frost in the snug little tow-boat.

The captain was very jolly over Billy's new outfit, and said his uncle wouldn't know him.

By this time it had begun to grow dark, so the captain said that Billy could stay on board that night, and in the meantime he must come home with him and see his own boys.

"Stop a bit! we must send over to the office first. I'll write a little note, and you can take it over, and then come back to the boat. When you are over there you can ask one of the men to send you back to the Elsie in one of the tugs."

Billy took the note, and some coppers to pay his fare over the ferry, and started for the city.

As he left the Cunard dock and entered the streets of East Boston he began to wonder if all that had happened was really true, and he pinched himself to see if he was Billy Staver.

Presently he came to the ruins of the fire, near the South Ferry. The blackened walls and piles of rubbish were still smoking. Could it be only two days since? It seemed years ago; so many things had happened in the meantime.

How differently everything looked now. Even the winter's wind did not seem so sharp, and everybody seemed to be busy and happy. What a difference it made to have good, warm clothes and a home, even if it was on board the Elsie. Ah! the Elsie was a fine boat! He could help the fireman and run errands for the captain, and everything would be perfectly splendid.

He paid his fare and went on board the ferry-boat, and then walked through the ladies' cabin and out on the bows. He was a passenger now, and he could go where he pleased.

The boat started, and though it was dark he kept a sharp lookout for the Sinfonia. The ferry-boat passed close under her stern, and they had a fine view of the splendid ship.

One of the officers on board saw him, and lifted his cap in a military salute, and Billy took off his cap as polite as you please.

Then he wondered if it really could be Billy Staver, the wretched little boy of North Bennet street? No, it was somebody else. He lived on the Elsie now—she was a splendid boat—and that other Billy Staver had gone away. This was a new Billy Staver.

Amusing himself thus with happy thoughts, he landed at the city, and with a light heart turned into Atlantic avenue to go to the wharf.

Suddenly a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a rough voice cried:

"Hah! me fine b'y. I 'ave ye now, ye spalpeen!"

In turn Billy looked up and saw a policeman standing over him. With a wild cry of despair Billy broke from the officer and ran for dear life down Atlantic avenue toward T wharf.

"Stop, thief!" cried the officer, springing after him.

Billy was young, and terror lent wings to his feet. The policeman was fat and short of breath, and in an instant the boy was yards ahead.

"Stop, thief! stop, thief!" bellowed the man, and the idlers on the walk took up the cry, and a mixed crowd of men and boys scrambled after the flying Billy.

Still he had a good start, and it was not over a quarter of a mile to the wharf. If he could only get there he was safe.

He had now reached Commercial wharf, and was about to spring across the street when a string of horses came

out on the track dragging some freight cars. Billy put out his hands against one of the horses to save himself from falling under the wheels, and then turned to the right into the avenue.

In an instant the crowd were upon him. A big fellow put out his foot and down went our hero in the snow and mud. In a moment the officer was up with him, and at once began to kick the child as he lay on the ground. The crowd cried:

"Shame! shame!" and the brutal man then rudely picked Billy up by the collar, and set him on his feet.

"Ye shall pay for that, ye spalpeen! Begorra! ye thought ye'd git away again, did ye? Come wid me now."

Shaking and pushing the child before him the officer marched off, and the idlers followed in a crowd behind.

"Begorra! I got ye now. Say, where did ye stale the foine close ye got?"

"I didn't steal 'em."

"It's lying ye'll be up to. Shet up and take that."

With this he gave Billy's ears a stout cuff, and it is no to be wondered at that the poor child, with his every hope shattered in an instant, began to cry as if his heart would break.

"Shet up, ye whelp!" cried the officer.

With an effort Billy choked back the tears and marched in grim silence through the streets with the officer's fingers twisted in his collar so tight that the poor boy could hardly breathe.

In a few moments they came to Hanover street, and turned down toward the station house.

Up the station house steps the officer dragged our hero, and with a rude push thrust him into the office, saying:

"There, ye young spalpeen! Now we'll fix ye."

The captain of the station sat by the desk, smoking and spitting on the floor. He recognized Billy at once in spite of his clothes, and taking his cigar from his mouth said:

"Well, Pat, ye've got the whelp sure this time."

"Begorra I have," said the officer, giving Billy's neck an extra twist.

"Stealing clothes this time," said the captain.

"I didn't steal 'em."

"Shut up!" cried the captain, giving Billy a slap on the mouth with the back of his hand.

"Have ye got any money?"

"Only the money the captain of the Sinfonia gave me."

"Lemme see it."

Billy reluctantly dragged forth the five gold sovereigns and then both the men laughed long and loud.

"He's a precious un, Pat."

"Faith, indade he is."

"Gimme the money."

Billy handed the money in silence to the captain, and he, like the fine officer that he was, put it in his pocket.

"Anything more?"

Billy drew out the captain's note. The man took it, opened it, and having read it twisted it up and lit it in the gas flame, for his cigar had gone out.

Just here there were loud shouts in the streets, as if some trouble was up.

"Go out, Pat, and break their heads, while I chuck the boy into a cell."

The patrolman seized a stout stick that stood in the corner and went out, and the captain, taking Billy by the shoulder, marched him down stairs into the horrible cellar where the cells were. One of them stood open, and into it with a brutal kick poor Billy was thrust.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW IT ALL ENDED.

It was in all the morning papers. Full details of the burning of the bark off Nantasket Beach, and the rescue of the crew, and the arrival of the Sinfonia in the storm. They had all that in with a truly wonderful account of the doings of the remarkable Billy Staver.

As for Billy, he knew nothing about it. He woke long before daylight. At first he could not tell where he was. Then he heard some one singing a drunken song in the next cell, and—oh, how horribly thirsty he was. If he could only have a drink of water. Of course there was

none in the cell. There never is. He must wait till one of the officers passed the door, and then perhaps he could have some.

There was nothing to do but to wait. He wondered what time it was and when it would be morning. The wretches in the other cells became more quiet, and Billy got up and looked out into the brick corridor. Then he thought he heard the rumble of a horse-car in the street. It must be near daylight.

After a while an officer came down the stairs, and Billy said:

"Please, mister, give me a drink."

The policeman said not a word, and walked past the doors of the cells without paying any attention.

The other prisoners heard his footsteps, and they too cried out for "water! water! please, sir, some water! some water!"

He did not heed them, and turned back to go up stairs again. As he passed Billy's cell the poor child pleaded once more for a drink, and stretched out his thin hands through the bars. The man only slapped the boy's hands, and with an oath bade him be quiet.

Billy slunk back into the cell and sat down. The other prisoners cursed the brutal officer. He did not pay any attention, and went slowly up stairs and closed the door, leaving the poor wretches to their own devices. Then it was very still for a long, long time, and Billy wondered if it had not forgotten to be day at all. More horse-cars rumbled past in the street, and once he thought he heard sleigh-bells.

Then a man came down to attend to the furnace fire. As soon as they heard his steps all the prisoners began to ask for water in a chorus.

This man was not heartless, and taking an old battered tin can he filled it with water, and passed it round till all were satisfied.

This was hardly finished when two officers came down, and unlocking one cell at a time let all the prisoners out. Part of them, being mere tramps and vagabonds, were suffered to go free, but those that had been arrested for thieving or other crimes, were bundled into the Black Maria and carted off to the police court. Among these went our Billy. They soon arrived at the court, when the judge looked at him a moment and then said:

"What is your name?"

"Billy Staver, and, sir, if you please, I belong on the steamer——"

"William Staver?"

"Yes, sir, William Staver; my father he was bu'sted up——"

Here all the people began to laugh, and the big officers shifted the quids in their mouths, and cried:

"Silence! Silence!"

"And, sir, I belong to the Elsie."

"Elsie?" said the judge. "What is the Elsie? Is she a steamship?"

"No, she's a tow-boat, and I belong on her, and we towed the Sinfonia."

"Sinfonia!" cried a policeman, starting up. "Is that the boy that was on the Sinfonia. Is his name Staver?"

The whole court stopped! What did this all mean? The judge asked the officer to step forward. He was a pleasant-looking man, and Billy felt better. The man fumbled in his hat, and then brought out a crumpled paper, which he opened and began to read:

"Inquiries have been made at all the offices for a boy supposed to be lost in the streets about six P. M. yesterday. His name is William Staver, and he had on——"

And, wonderful to tell, the man described everything that Billy had on. The judge and all the people became greatly interested, and wondered what would happen next.

Then the officer read more.

"The boy had been on the steamship Sinfonia, and——"

Just here a tall, fine-looking man entered the courtroom, and standing by the door listened to what was going on in silence.

Then the officer proceeded to describe Billy's eyes and hair and just how he looked.

The judge thought it a very strange case, and said he must consider it.

Billy here thrust his hand in his pocket, and exclaimed:

"Oh! There now! Golly! isn't that just lucky?"

The people all laughed, and the judge commanded silence.

"What is that you have in your hand?"

"It's a card. A man gave it to me on the steamer."

"Let me see it."

The card was handed to the judge.

The judge smiled, and then sent a boy over to the tall gentleman who stood at the door. He came forward, and the judge showed him the card. He seemed greatly surprised, and then came over to where Billy stood.

The judge then said that this was a very curious case, and that the Honorable Joseph Proctor would be counsel for the boy, and that they would at once sift the matter to the bottom. The boy could confer with his counsel and in the meantime the next case might come on.

The gentleman took Billy by the hand, and led him into a side room, and there Billy repeated his whole story from the very beginning.

And right in the middle of it all in came Billy's uncle, Captain James Staver of the tow-boat Jessie, and Captain Frost of the Elsie. And such a jolly time as they had. When Billy finished his story, every word of which the captain said was true, they all went out to dinner at Parker's—really and truly went to the Parker House in great state. Billy thought it was a splendid dinner, but he couldn't help wondering how the trial would end. Then they sent messengers all over town, and at one o'clock they went back to the court-house for Billy's trial. The place was crammed full, and Billy couldn't see for the tall folks that would stand up in front of him.

Presently they put him on a high seat, and then to his great surprise he saw the captain of the Sinfonia, the officers of the Flanders, the first mate of the bark, and Susie Proctor all sitting in a row together.

The court commanded silence, and the trial began.

Captain Frost entered his testimony to the effect that Billy had lived on the Elsie for two days, and had behaved like the smart boy that he was all the time. If the court would please he would take the boy and be responsible for him—provided the boy's uncle was willing.

The captain of the Sinfonia gave evidence in Billy's favor, and gave an account of Billy's adventures on the steamer, and then his uncle put in his claim, and said that the boy really belonged to him and that he would take care of him.

In that case there was nothing more to be done.

The judge said that it was a plain case, and if the boy desired to go with his uncle he could do so. If there were no further witnesses to be examined the case might be dismissed. Mr. Proctor, who had all this time sat near by, then rose and said:

"And now, if I may bring a personal matter into the case, I may say that it was my own daughter who was rescued from a terrible death by this brave little fellow. I would like to adopt the boy, and make him my own son."

Billy never could tell what happened after that. The judge shook hands with him, and said he was a fine little fellow. Susie Proctor actually kissed him, and his uncle shook both his hands at once, and said he was quite willing, and Captain Frost shook hands with him, and so did everybody else, and really it was such a remarkable time that he couldn't tell exactly what did happen.

At last they all went down stairs in a noisy, merry crowd, and there, wonderful to tell, stood that same pair of horses he had seen at East Boston and the same carriage. It was just like a fairy story. Susie got in and took the front seat, and then Billy got in and took the back seat. Then Mr. Proctor got in. The grand coachman mounted to his place, and the horses pranced and started. The folks on the walk took off their hats and said, "Good-by, good-by," and actually gave three cheers for Billy Staver right there in Court square, Boston.

(THE END.)

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